



First Choice

Housing Association Limited • Cymdeithas Tai

Dewis Cyntaf Cyf



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Since 1988 First Choice has been the only housing association in Wales that provides homes for people with a learning disability and other vulnerable people. At March 2016 we had 218 properties with 654 bed spaces. We work in 18 local authority areas with more than 30 support providers.



To make sure we provide a good service we offer training to support provider staff about service charges, getting things fixed and how to use equipment like hoists, hi-lo baths, etc. We also tell our new tenants about their tenancy rights and responsibilities.

First Choice has won several Taking Part awards over the past few years. 223 tenants came to 21 First Choice events during 2015/16. Information is passed between tenants and Board members at our 'Ivor Choice Club' meetings. Our Independent Tenant Representative helps with this.



First Choice has lots of meetings with local authorities. Each year we look into how many people with a learning disability need housing. We make sure that we are performing well and providing a good service. Each year we ask the organisations we work with, as well as our tenants, what they think about our services.

Through our 'self-evaluation' we look at how we meet our tenants' needs and try to make our services better. We will continue to ask our tenants, staff and other organisations whether the judgements we make about our own performance are right. First Choice tenant council members, Board and senior staff have all worked together see whether we are providing a good service.



Does First Choice Deliver a Good Service

First Choice Tenants, Board and staff have worked together to find out if First Choice delivered a good service.

We used the scoring system of red for poor and dark green for an excellent service.



1.0 How is First Choice Run?



- We use our taking part events to listen to tenants' views and feedback what was talked about. This way we make sure that our services get even better.
 - Our last survey said that 94% of tenants felt that their home was right for their needs. Only 6% said their homes did not meet their needs, so we carried out adaptations or changes to make their homes meet their needs.
- We provide training for our tenants to help them understand their tenancy rights and responsibilities.
- We have an independent representative from Welsh Tenants that attends our Ivor Choice Club meetings. He tells the tenants'

views to our Board so that the Board can make informed decisions and plan our future services.

- An Independent Tenant Quality Assurance officer visits tenants at their homes to make sure tenants have a voice in how services are run. In the last tenants' survey 97% of tenants were happy that we listened to what they want and did what they asked.



- We use easy read documents such as the "Getting Things Fixed" file and the "Tenant Handbook" to tell tenants about their rights and responsibilities and emergency contact details.
- The association achieved 99% satisfaction from tenants in meeting our service standards in 2015/16. These standards were set out in 2014 after talking with First Choice tenants and tenants from 2 other associations. These make sure that tenants with a learning disability will have the same standard of service, even if they have a different landlord.
- 100% of our tenants' support providers said that the association sends out clear and correct information about our services.



- 81% of non-tenant 'stakeholders' were satisfied with our services. The association will work hard to get better scores. One support provider said "Tenant Participation is excellent. There are many opportunities for tenants to get involved and the information provided is very accessible. The senior management team are friendly, approachable and have great values".
- 100% of tenants who contacted First Choice with a problem or complaint in the last 12 months said it was easy to report and 99% were happy with the way that First Choice handled their call.





2.0 We are Honest and Open

- Information is easy to read, aimed at the needs of tenants and updates on our activities are on our website.
- We give information about our homes to local authorities and the Welsh Government.
- All information is provided in a timely and efficient way that the person asking for the information can understand.
- The Director of Corporate Services makes sure that we follow the Data Protection Act and our own Data Protection Policy.
- We have increased the information we have about our tenants from 50% to 100%.



- We ask our tenants questions about themselves in our tenant survey, at participation events, at property inspections and by writing to the tenant, their support staff and social services and tell them how important it is that we get to know our tenants because this is how we can make our services even better.
- Ivor Voice Club meetings and participation events move around Wales and Shropshire so that all tenants have the chance to take part.
- Important documents are available in Welsh on request and our website can translate into any language.



- All of our new homes are built to the current code for sustainable homes and some have things to make living there cheaper and environmentally friendly. We also carry out work on homes to the Welsh Government minimum standards and make the local area look better.

We help people get jobs with our building and buying of homes and our maintenance contracts.



- Adapted homes allow people to live in the local community and raises awareness of what it is like to have a learning disability.

First Choice has money to spend in the community and to support other groups. We gave money to:

- The Welsh Sports Association for People with Learning Disabilities
- The purchase of specialist bicycles
- Vale People First Annual Conference
- The cost of workshop equipment at the Erlas Victorian Walled Garden in Wrexham
- A local allotment project
- On-going servicing of a changing table within a changing facility in Carmarthenshire



3.0 We make sure that our plans are clear and everyone knows what to do.

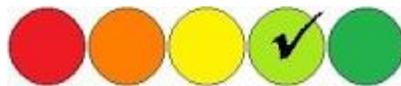
- We follow our rules
- We work with partners including other social landlords, support provider organisations, Community Housing Cymru (CHC), military charities and the Welsh Government.



- A committee checks that all staff and Board members have the right skills, training and abilities. The Board carry out their own self-assessment to see if they have the rights skills and deliver the right outcomes and look at the services provided to our tenants. We hold a Board strategy day to set goals for staff. We have a scrutiny committee to make sure that these goals are met and look at the whole of the business.

New Plans

We will build homes in Wrexham, Flintshire and Ceredigion for people that have left the armed services. These homes will help people that used to be in the army, navy or air force to live in the community. There will also be a new home for people that have left the armed services which they will build themselves; this will allow them to gain new skills.



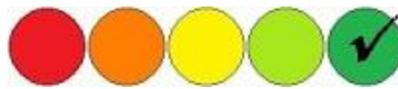
4.0 We have money to run First Choice

- The staff and the Board make sure First Choice spends money wisely.
- We have a 30 year spending plan in place so we will know how much money we can spend and earn for the next 30 years.

- We may sure that we have the money to carry out maintenance repairs.
- We make sure that there are no risks to the association.
- We make sure that we show what money is going out and what money is coming in.
- How the association controls our money is checked by a company that is independent to First Choice. This company writes a report on what they find and gives it to our management team and one of our committees to look at.
- As a result of the last review we have a changed some things we do. We have set up a plan to help tenants to make the most of their money.



Understanding risk and money is one of our strengths.



5.0 We talk to you about our services

We work in partnership with other organisations to make sure we are providing a good service.

- In 2015 100% satisfaction was reported in relation to First Choice's support to Local Authorities in the delivery of their strategic housing role to house vulnerable people.

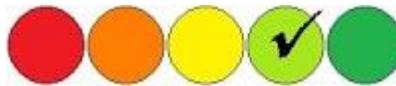


- We have received very high satisfaction results from our tenant survey.
- We talk to new tenants and visit support providers offices.

- Tenants have told us that there are enough ways to take part.
- We talk to the Welsh Government about any changes to your homes.

- We have talked to parents, carers groups and schools to tell them about our services.
- By working together with local authorities, local residents and the armed services we make sure that we are helping local vulnerable people.
- We work with our partners and with the Local Authority where we can to address breaches of tenancy or neighbour issues. Everyone that we asked in our survey said that First Choice Housing was doing a good job.

We had positive results from our partnership and tenant surveys.

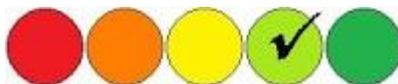


6.0 How we deliver a good service

- We build good quality homes for people to live in for a long time.
- When building a home we make sure that we have agreed the design of the home with the Local Authority team and have worked with the tenants to ensure the home meets their needs.
- We build homes to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS), Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3, Secure by Design and Lifetime Homes Standard.
- We are starting a self-build home in Wrexham. The self-build will provide homes for 16 people that have left the armed forces.
- We make sure that we know the risks and have a plan in place at each stage of building a new home. We know at an early stage

how much it will cost to build the home and how much it will cost in rent.

- A First Choice director that was not involved in the building of the home visits the new tenants and asks what they think of their new home. That way we can make sure that we are delivering what our tenants want. In a survey, a high number of tenants were happy with where they lived.



7.0 How we look after our homes

- We carry out regular maintenance checks and check houses for asbestos every year.
- We ask every 2 years if our tenant's needs are changing.
- We met the changing needs of our tenants by using money from the Welsh Government and First Choice's own money. All of our support provider partners have said that our homes are maintained to a standard that is safe and right for our tenants.



- If the Local Authority tells us that they do not want the property anymore then we can sell the property and use the money to buy a new home.
- We work closely with Local Authorities to make sure that we don't have many empty bedrooms and we say how many empty bedrooms we have on the association's website.



- We help the Local Authorities with people that are homeless in a number of different homes from permanent or short term care/respice accommodation.

- We make sure that access to our homes is fair and open, and we work with others to ensure that everyone knows how to access our homes.



- When we re-let a property, many tenants tell us that they are happy with their new home.

- By working closely with local authority commissioners we provide and adapt long term specially made homes to meet the tenants current and future needs.

Housing people that used to be in the armed forces

- First Choice now provides temporary shared homes for people with support needs that used to be in the armed forces.
- This has seen the first 'managing agent' partnership between First Choice and Alabare Christian Care and Support. Alabare is responsible for selecting new tenants, managing the residents and providing support. To be able to live in these homes you must either be homeless/threatened with homelessness or not be housed well – or have other support needs.





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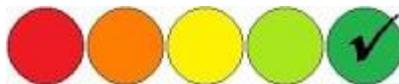
8.0 How we make sure that our tenancies are fair

- We issue the safest form of tenancy agreements we can.
- Our Tenancy Agreement states the roles and responsibilities of tenants and First Choice.
- To help tenants understand important parts of the tenancy agreement we send out an easy read tenant handbook and DVD. 99% of tenants told us that their Tenant Handbook, 'Your First Choice Home' DVD and Rights and Responsibilities workbook explain their rights and responsibilities as a First Choice tenant.
- All support providers told us that First Choice helps them deal with problems including anti-social behaviour by tenants.



- Our homes are built to the needs of the tenant and, as a result, we maintain the servicing of additional equipment.
- We support our tenants by making sure that they claim money that they are entitled to. The cost of our service charge can go up and down depending on the cost of looking after the equipment each year.
- We send out a service charge statement to every tenant each year.

- We follow the Welsh Government guidelines in rent changes and tell all tenants in easy read writing of any changes to their yearly rent.
- Our homes are safe, secure and well-maintained with newly built homes meeting the secure by design standard.
- With the help of our partners we talk with local people about any concerns.
- We have talked to tenants throughout Wales and Shropshire and started a Community Involvement Strategy.
- Nearly all of our tenants have told us that they are happy with where they live.
- We feel that we are good at telling tenants about their rights and responsibilities and we continue to have low levels of rent arrears.



9.0 We get things fixed quickly and plan for future repairs

- We carry out full checks on the condition of our properties every 5 years and we regularly check to see if anything needs to be improved.
- The money used to make these improvements is in our 30 year financial plan.



- The Association met the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) in December 2012.

- We work out our planned repairs by working out what the condition of our homes will be over a few years.

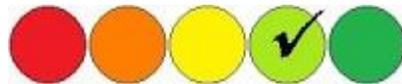
- We check how long something will last during our regular property inspections.
- We use local contractors.
- Where we can, we buy straight from the manufacturers so that we have the newest products and guarantees.
- We talk with tenants and make choices together on all larger repairs, such as new kitchens and new homes.



- In our tenant survey a high number of tenants told us that they were happy with the quality of work, happy about being kept informed and happy with the way the contractors behaved.

- First Choice has a repairs appointment system which means better service for our tenants.
- All emergency repairs are done in 24 hours and other repairs within 7 days, at a time when the tenants want them done.

- Appointments are made by the association's maintenance staff to make sure that tenants have choice.
- After a repair has been carried out the association will telephone to see if the tenants are satisfied with the service they received.
- Our tenants have told us that they like our new maintenance system.



10.0 Services for tenants who buy their own home

- The association does not sell our properties to our tenants. No First Choice tenant has bought their own home.
- First Choice does not offer a shared ownership scheme for tenants.

